

VZCZCXRO3937

RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR

DE RUEHVJ #0643/01 1471320

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

R 271320Z MAY 09

FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0255

INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/JCS WASHINGTON DC

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 000643

SIPDIS

EUR/SCE FOR HYLAND, FOOKS, MCGUIRE; NSC FOR HELGERSON; OSD
FOR BEIN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR KDEM BK

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - TIHIC VICTORY SENDS MESSAGE: SDA WANTS
PATH OF COMPROMISE

REF: A. SARAJEVO 556

1B. SARAJEVO 501

1C. SARAJEVO 103

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: At its party congress on May 26 (Ref A), the Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA) reelected its moderate, pro-European president, Sulejman Tihic, who immediately pledged to continue working toward reforms vital for Bosnia's future. Tihic comfortably defeated right-wing candidate Bakir Izetbegovic, son of SDA co-founder and Bosnian wartime president Alija Izetbegovic. Tihic's reelection has already sparked change within the party, as Federation Prime Minister Brankovic, a close associate of Izetbegovic, has submitted his resignation. Our SDA contacts tell us that Tihic may soon ask other ineffective SDA officials -- including state-level Security Minister Tarik Sadovic -- to follow suit. Although Tihic is beginning to take bold steps toward redefining SDA, he will face an uphill battle from Izetbegovic's supporters, including the Islamic community, thus far silent in the media on Tihic's victory. Although down, the right-wing elements of Bosniak politics are far from out, and they are capable of mounting a credible opposition even to an emboldened Tihic in the run-up to the 2010 general elections. END SUMMARY

Tihic Captures Comfortable Majority

12. (SBU) At the May 26 SDA party congress and presidential elections, Sulejman Tihic demonstrated that he retains the staunch support of Bosnia's largest and most influential Bosniak party. Tihic captured 425 delegate votes, with Bakir Izetbegovic -- son of party co-founder and Bosnian wartime president Alija Izetbegovic -- taking second place with 301 votes. Former Council of Ministers (CoM) chairman Adnan Terzic came in third, with 19 votes. The party's Deputy President, Asim Sarajlic, and the six party Vice Presidents -- all of whom were also elected at the congress -- are aligned with Tihic as well. Tihic immediately told the press that retaining the unity of his party, improving its efficiency, and continuing reforms based on compromise would be his top priorities. Tihic also stated that "time has shown that the politics of all or nothing, usually results in nothing. Today we are returning to the April package (of constitutional reform), something that is clearly evident through the visit of (US Vice President) Joseph Biden and (EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy) Javier Solana. To achieve similar results, we would require far stronger engagement from the US administration."

Tihic to Clean House?

¶13. (C) Immediately after Tihic,s reelection, Federation Prime Minister Nedzad Brankovic -- a long time opponent of Tihic, whom Tihic has attempted several times to remove (Ref B) -- prepared his resignation, which the media confirmed he submitted on May 27. If the Federation Presidency -- which includes a representative of Haris Silajdzic,s Party for BiH (SBiH), a party ideologically aligned with Izetbegovic -- accepts Brankovic,s resignation, the entire Federation government is likely to fall. Tihic also may be eyeing changes at the state level, as a number of contacts close to Tihic have indicated to us that Tihic also may be planning to oust state-level Security Minister Tarik Sadovic.

Izetbegovic Down but Not Out

¶14. (C) Tihic,s victory constitutes a setback for the Izetbegovic-led right wing of the party. Izetbegovic reaffirmed publicly, as he had privately told us before the congress, that he plans to refrain from holding a leadership position within the party and will remain a "regular party official." However, the media reported that Izetbegovic conveyed to Tihic after the announcement of his victory that Izetbegovic "retains great influence within the party and intends to use it." The Islamic community, which staunchly supports Izetbegovic yet whose leadership -- including Reis Mustafa Ceric -- was invited but did not attend the party congress, has yet to respond publicly to Izetbegovic,s loss.

SARAJEVO 00000643 002 OF 002

Comment

¶15. (C) Tihic,s victory opens a window for him to take some important steps toward improving the efficiency of the Federation government -- beginning with ousting Brankovic -- and could well pave the way for greater movement on our policy goals, particularly constitutional reform and the PIC,s "five plus two" requirements for OHR closure. His reelection also will probably cement SDA in the eyes of its interlocutors, both within Bosniak political circles and among the other ethnic groups, as the main Bosniak interlocutor, one that is prepared for interethnic compromise. Tihic,s moderate politics could therefore help tone down some of Republika Srpska (RS) PM Milorad Dodik,s anti-state rhetoric -- which Silajdzic in his heyday helped inflame -- by diminishing the validity of Dodik,s claim that Bosniak political leaders are alienating the Serbs.

¶16. (C) Although Tihic,s reelection marks a step toward a more moderate face for Bosniak politics, he will face an uphill battle from the Islamic community and Izetbegovic,s supporters, who are unlikely to sit quietly on the sidelines of Bosniak politics. The Islamic community of late has criticized Tihic for not being "sufficiently Bosniak" (Ref C), a theme which could resonate with certain elements of the Bosniak populace, particularly ahead of the fall 2010 general elections. If Tihic sidelines Izetbegovic and his supporters or attacks their business interests, the Islamic community would almost certainly use the same argument to attack Tihic.

The right-wing faction of Bosniak politics also will heap blame on Tihic for the Federation,s woes if his reform efforts fail in advance of the 2010 elections. Tihic,s main line of defense is his backing from the international community. Therefore, as he takes increasingly bold strokes within his party and government, he will look to us to provide public and private assurances that we support his moderate policies and his path to compromise and dialogue.

ENGLISH